DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 463 079 PS 030 221

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TITLE An Integrated Approach to Early Childhood Education and Care: A Preliminary Study. Occasional Paper.
INSTITUTION Toronto Univ. (Ontario). Centre for Urban and Community Studies.
SPONS AGENCY Human Resources Development Canada, Ottawa (Ontario).
REPORT NO OP-16
ISBN ISBN-1-896051-17-0
PUB DATE 2002-01-00
NOTE 25p.; Paper presented at the International Conference on Early Childhood Education and Care: International Policy Issues (Stockholm, Sweden, June 13-15, 2001).
AVAILABLE FROM Childcare Resource and Research Unit, Centre for Urban and Community Studies, University of Toronto, 455 Spadina Avenue, Room 305, Toronto, Ontario M5S 2G8, Canada. Tel: 416-978-6895; Fax: 416-971-2139; e-mail: crru@chass.utoronto.ca; Web site: http://www.childcarecanada.org.
PUB TYPE Information Analyses (070) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Change Strategies; *Day Care; Developed Nations; Developing Nations; *Early Childhood Education; *Educational Change; Foreign Countries; Government Role; *Integrated Services; Partnerships in Education; *Public Policy; Socialization
IDENTIFIERS *Government Family Partnerships; Paradigm Shifts

ABSTRACT

This paper reflects upon the policy development and implementation of integrated or coordinated services of early childhood education and care (ECEC) within a systemic perspective, focusing on issues of relevance to both developed and developing countries. The paper is divided into four parts: (1) issues related to ECEC's cultural and historical background; (2) the paradigm shift toward integrated or coordinated ECEC systems; (3) practical issues of coordination and integration related to policy and program implementation; and (4) trends, benefits, and concerns regarding the process of integration. The paper illustrates the historical context that creates in most countries a split provision between the welfare and education systems, with child care the responsibility of the family and education provided by the state for children over 3 years of age. The paper maintains that in most countries the current ECEC status reflects a transitional phase calling for a reexamination of the public/private tensions in this policy area and making their way toward a view of ECEC as a shared responsibility. A model is proposed based on a partnership between families and the state as well as a new definition of integration in ECEC highlighting the attitudinal changes regarding the state's role in educating and socializing children. The paper calls for universal ECEC provision integrated under one auspice and built on the premises of quality, continuity, flexibility, diversity, and an inclusive approach. Such provision requires cooperation from ECEC practitioners, an integrated curriculum, qualified staff, a centralized implementation framework, parent involvement, and strong public financing. Ways for avoiding the risks associated with reforming ECEC are explained. (Contains 17 references.) (KB)

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Occasional Paper No. 16

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Contribution to the workshop: *Toward a systemic and integrated approach to policy development and implementation.*
International Conference on Early Childhood Education and Care: International Policy Issues.
Organized by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development and the Swedish National Agency for Education
Stockholm, Sweden.
June 13-15, 2001

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Childcare Resource and Research Unit
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University of Toronto
January 2002

An integrated approach to early childhood education and care: A preliminary study
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Childcare Resource and Research Unit
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Occasional Paper 16
January 2002 *vi* 20 pp.
ISBN 1-896051-17-0

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Cover design: Opus House

National Library of Canada Cataloguing in Publication Data

Lenira Haddad
An integrated approach to early childhood education and care: A preliminary study

ISBN 1-896051-17-0

1. Early childhood education. 2. Child care. I. University of Toronto.
Childcare Resource and Research Unit. II. Title.

LB11300.23.H23 2001 372.211 C2001-903895-X

About the author

Lenira Haddad has been a researcher, consultant and trainer in the field of early childhood education and care since 1978. She is currently a coordinator of EDUCERE-Centro de Formação para a Educação Infantil (Early Childhood Education Training Centre) and collaborator professor at the College of Education, University of São Paulo. Graduated in Psychology with an MA in Educational Psychology and PhD in Education by the University of São Paulo, she developed part of her PhD in Sweden at the Department of Education, University of Gothenburg. As part of her PhD project she carried out a set of study visits and exchange programs with countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, Portugal, Spain, Italy, Estonia, Sweden, Denmark and Norway. Her main research interest is the challenging area of integration between care and education within a socio-ecological perspective.

The research upon which Dr. Haddad based this presentation at the Stockholm conference is funded by the OECD and UNESCO, and will be published in a fuller form in 2002.

Acknowledgments

The Childcare Resource and Research unit and its publications are supported by Child Care Visions, Human Resources Development Canada whose contribution is very much appreciated. The point of view in this paper does not necessarily reflect the views of the funder.

Preface

In June of this year, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) held a conference in Stockholm to release and showcase *Starting Strong*, the report of its comparative study of early childhood education and care (ECEC) in 12 countries in western Europe, Scandinavia, the United States, the United Kingdom and Australia. I, together with five other Canadians, had the good fortune to attend the conference as members of a Canadian delegation. The opportunity for exchange and debate with 200 delegates from a wide range of countries on ECEC policy and service provision was exciting and invaluable for conceptualizing the future of ECEC in Canada.

Starting Strong is an important contribution to the development of ECEC for a number of reasons, not the least of which is that the results of the comparative review contain eight key policy elements that support what the report terms "equitable access to quality ECEC" Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development 2001: 11. These policy elements are:

1. A systemic and integrated approach for children from birth to 8 years, co-ordinated at centralized and decentralized levels by a lead jurisdiction that encourages links among government, staff and parents;
2. A strong and equal partnership with education;
3. A universal approach to access with public attention to special needs;
4. Substantial public investment in services and infrastructure;
5. A participatory approach to quality improvement and assurance;
6. Appropriate training and working conditions for staff;
7. Systematic attention to monitoring and data collection;
8. A stable framework and long-term agenda for research and evaluation.

In addition to the release of *Starting Strong*, the conference included presentations by a variety of people involved in ECEC in their countries. Dr. Lenira Haddad of Brazil presented this paper in Stockholm.

The paper is an excellent treatment of the OECD results framed in a Brazilian context. Dr. Haddad introduces the discussion by describing the historical background to ECEC that creates, in most countries, the split provision between the welfare and the education systems. "Care" is the family's (usually the mother's) task, particularly where children under age three are concerned, and the state's role is

limited to intervention to remediate or prevent harm. Pre-school "education", however, while it is perceived to be of benefit to all children and is more likely to have stronger state support, it is usually primarily for children age three and older. Dr. Haddad states that the current status of ECEC in most countries reflects a transitional phase, calling for a rethink of the public/private tensions in this policy area and making their way towards a view of ECEC as "a shared responsibility...bringing together both its social and educational dimensions."

Dr. Haddad proposes a "third model" based on a partnership between families and the state (and seen most often in Scandinavia) as well as a new definition of integration in ECEC which moves beyond the current notion of local and administrative co-ordination to highlight the attitudinal changes regarding the role of the state in the education and socialization of children. These changes are necessary in the process of re-thinking the development and implementation of policies and programs for young children. She calls for universal ECEC provision integrated under one auspice and built on "the premises of quality, continuity, flexibility, diversity and an inclusive approach." Such provision requires sectoral co-operation from all parts of the ECEC field, an integrated curriculum, appropriately qualified staff, a centralized implementation framework that would ensure elements like equitable access in all parts of a country while respecting the need for local decision-making, parent involvement and strong public financing in the form of a special ECEC fund. This last is necessary to avoid consequences such as those seen in Brazil — when integration of ECEC services for preschoolers under education was not accompanied by the transfer of funds from the welfare side, resulting in a lack of attention to the under-threes and to the needs for full-time provision.

There are risks associated with new ways of doing things. Dr. Haddad suggests that risks in reforming ECEC can be avoided by establishing "a hierarchy of priorities for the process of ECEC integration starting by focusing on the requirements needed to build ECEC's own culture and identity, then moving on to education, and then proceeding to the further conquest of a strong and equal partnership with the schools." The application of the findings of *Starting Strong* to a specific jurisdiction is an interesting process and can provide ideas for future direction as countries work to develop future direction for ECEC.

Julie Mathien
City of Toronto

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper

This paper aims at contributing some reflections on the policy development and implementation of integrated or co-ordinated services of early childhood education and care (ECEC) within a systemic perspective. As a Brazilian researcher who has studied this particular subject in Scandinavian and other European countries, I shall address issues pertinent to both developed and developing countries.

The paper is divided into four parts, encompassing issues related to early childhood education and care's cultural and historical background; the paradigm shift towards integrated or co-ordinated ECEC systems; practical issues of co-ordination and integration related to policy and programme implementation as well as trends, benefits and concerns regarding the process of integration.

Methodology

The main sources of information used to prepare this paper are the following:

- OECD Thematic Review documents: Country Background Reports, Country Notes and Comparative Report;
- Education For All (EFA) 2000 Assessment's Country Reports;
- Papers produced by the Consultative Group on Early Childhood Care and Development.

The relevance of the OECD Thematic Review of ECEC

The adoption of a common denominator, such as ECEC, to refer to the set of possibilities that cover the services oriented to the care and education of young children has some important implications:

- It recognizes that all types of service providing care and education for children below school age belong to the same field;
- It addresses the multiplicity of dimensions involved in the field;
- It leads to convergent actions with regard to policy, programmes or research.

The organization of a state-of-the-art overview of the current ECEC policy and provision in different countries taking into account the various spheres pertinent to the field represents an initiative of inestimable value because:

- It makes possible the comprehension of each country's present position in relation to the global context;
- It facilitates the identification of common forces that promote or hinder unified action, philosophy, management and regulation;
- It results in a good framework for the various countries, stimulating the exchange of experiences and collaboration in the quest for possible and desirable solutions.

I ECEC SYSTEMS: HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL BACKGROUND

The comprehension of the historical and cultural background of the ECEC services is of the utmost importance for the interpretation of its present position and for the implementation of a pro-integration policy.

Rationales for different ways of organizing ECEC policy and provision

The OECD Country Reports make reference to the existence, as a historical background, of at least two blocks of services for young children. One, more care focused, operated during longer hours each day, and was oriented to children and families deemed to be in need. The other, more deliberately educationally focused, operated only a few hours a day, and was designed to enrich children's experiences. On the other hand, research shows the lack of any originally sharply defined functions distinguishing the various institutions for young children (Kuhlmann, 1990/96). Rather, such a dichotomy has been determined by historical forces arising from cultural beliefs and values regarding the family's and the mother's responsibilities in caring for their children (Caldwell, 1989, Haddad, 1991).

The dominant view from the past, strongly influenced by the "ideology of the family" is that the education and upbringing of young children is a private affair and not a public responsibility. While regarded as a family task or a mother's task, public responsibility is minimal or limited. As a consequence, two sharply distinguished rationales have arisen. The first regards society's role as limited to interference in exceptional cases, when children are endangered due to a 'lack' of family care, thus supporting the historical child care "block". The other regards the state's resources as being only legitimately applied in the sphere of education, thus supporting the pre-school education "block".

The current status of ECEC policy in most countries reflects a transitional period from an old to a new order. This includes deep changes in societies in general and in the family's structure in particular, while the emergence of new roles for women and mothers as well as for men and fathers call for a review of the family-state relationship regarding the responsibility for the care and education of children. As a result, a growing view of ECEC as a shared responsibility is taking place, bringing together both its social and educational dimensions.

Views of childhood, learning and development and the purpose of ECEC

As a background, at least two predominant views of childhood have shaped the purpose of ECEC in the various countries. One regards childhood as a special period calling for care; the other sees it as preparation for the future. In countries that share the view that children need to be prepared to learn or to start school so that they can eventually take their places as workers in a globalized economy, provision may emphasise the importance of good quality early childhood experiences to prepare children to succeed in formal schooling, the labour force, and society. Within that perspective, countries may either target programmes to specific groups — as a way to compensate for the disadvantage experienced by children from home environments that are deemed deficient in some way — or make it a policy priority for all children to have the right to high quality education from an early age, regardless of socio-economic status or ethnic origin. In both cases, there is a similar focus on children as a human capital investment, which shapes the purposes of the provision of ECEC.

Thanks to developments in this field including the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and research on the sociology of childhood, a new view of childhood as an important phase of life in its own right is gaining ground. Children are valued as individuals, groups and communities, as having their own culture, rights and voice. In this view, they are able to take part in the choice and planning of activities or to participate according to their maturity in the evaluation of the institutions they attend. For this view, ECEC does not seek to influence later school or workforce performance, or to prepare children for the future. Rather, ECEC institutions are viewed as places for children to live out their lives in the "here and now". The adoption of this view of childhood has moved the teaching and learning approach of ECEC and school away from the dominant tradition.

II THE PARADIGM SHIFT TOWARD INTEGRATED OR CO-ORDINATED ECEC SYSTEMS

The need for a sound definition of ECEC

The OECD Thematic Review has taken a broad, holistic, integrated and coherent approach to the concept of early childhood education and care (ECEC).

- It includes all arrangements providing care and education for children from birth to under compulsory school age, regardless of setting, funding and opening hours;
- It considers other related domains: family support, health, lifelong learning, employment and social integration policies;
- It gives attention to issues concerning the children's transition to compulsory school and out-of-school provision;
- It advocates the close association of care and education, with a view to eradicating the historical distinction between "child care" and "early childhood education".

Within this perspective, the term ECEC suggests shifts in the services' approach and objectives — from selective and exclusive to universal and inclusive — and sets out the elements that grant legitimacy to the system: integration, unity, continuity, comprehensiveness and coherence. These elements are in contradistinction to that which is disintegrated, divided, discontinuous, fragmented and inconsistent.

The need for broader theoretical frameworks

The paradigm shift has also resulted in the expansion of the concept of ECEC, which has some important implications:

- It gives the correlated areas greater visibility and thus brings out the multidimensional nature of the field;
- It obscures the boundaries among the disciplines.
- It calls for a treatment of the facts on the basis of their interdependence, not as if one were dealing with a single cause and effect relationship.

Thus, systemic approaches are needed in order to treat factors of different orders (cultural, historical, political, sociological, psychological, pedagogical and physical) on the basis of common ground. In this field, some theoretical frameworks have supported this perspective. These have been propped in, for example, Urie Bronfenbrenner's ecology of human development theory (1974, 1979, 1992) in which the context is organized in terms of micro, meso, exo and macro systems, and

Moncrieff Cochran's (1993) framework linking macro-level causes and mediating influences with policy and programme outcomes.

An integrated approach to the ECEC system

Within this section I would like to propose an approach to an integrated system of ECEC which I have developed since my doctoral thesis (Haddad, 1997), in which ECEC is seen as a third model. This new model builds on the removal of the inconsistencies of the previous models of child care and early childhood education, the recognition of their positive qualities, and the addition of a new element, which gives a dynamic and evolutionary meaning to the whole.

The new element comes from the paradigm shift from an exclusively family responsibility to a shared responsibility, which is the legitimation of out-of-home child socialization. This means that a significant portion of the upbringing process has now become a public concern and calls for:

- a redefinition of public (state) and private (family) relationships concerning children's affairs;
- the recognition of the child's right to be cared for and socialized in a wider social context than that of the family;
- the recognition of the family's right to share the care and education of the child with society;
- the professionalization of care and the enlargement of the concept of education.

It is essential to comprehend the implications of this third approach for policy and programme implementation so that efforts may converge and strategies of integration can be fully effective.

The need for a sound definition of integrated services

In the international literature, the term "integration" is used to describe the process of creating a network of services that work together. Integration is seen as a means to improve the effectiveness of services while at the same time reducing public costs. In the field of ECEC, it is related to co-ordinated policy for children through the formation of integrated networks among kindred sectors such as social welfare, school system, family, employment and health services (OECD, 1998 a and b, 2001).

I would like to propose a view of integration that goes beyond the local and administrative dimensions and brings to the fore changes of attitudes regarding the role of the state concerning the care, socialization and education of children and the consequent review of the structure and functions of the services for small children. Within this perspective, the formation of networks (among departments, sectors and

ministries) should be a natural consequence of a growing awareness of the interconnectedness of early childhood services and family life.

III PRACTICAL ISSUES OF INTEGRATION: CHALLENGES AND BENEFITS

Policy implementation

State responsibility

When early childhood related matters are seen as a social investment to which the society as a whole is committed to contributing, the state has greater participation in providing a wider age range provision and focusing on the whole development of the child. Although there is a growing view of ECEC as a shared responsibility between the family and the state, in many countries the state is still reluctant to intervene in the family domain, especially when it comes to investments for under-threes and full time coverage.

Administrative auspices

The traditional division into education on one hand, and welfare or health sectors on the other does not contribute to strengthening the ECEC system nor does it help in children's transition from one service to another. Although the division is normally determined by the age of the children — the younger being in the welfare or health sector and the older in educational — it has historically brought out the split between the social and educational dimensions of the ECEC, which accounts for the overlapping of ages found in some countries. These differences in objectives have strongly influenced the way the ECEC services are organized in each sector, in terms of targets, regulation, funding, delivery, admission criteria, hours of functioning, etc.

An integrated approach calls for a co-ordinated or single administrative structure, which may increase the effectiveness of the services, though not guaranteeing their integration. I can give two different examples of this. In Spain, the unification of the services under the auspices of the Ministry of Education since 1990 did not eliminate the inconsistencies previously found between the under-threes cycle that was linked to the welfare sector, and the over-threes cycle, linked to the educational sector. Huge differences in terms of coverage, hours of opening, admission criteria, staffing (both working hours and qualification), and adult-child ratio still remain. In some counties in Brazil, the transfer to education was followed by a radical reduction in the attention given to children below three years of age, and in the provision of full time care for children in general as a consequence of the strong emphasis on the educational dimension. Both cases illustrate the great challenge for policy makers in guaranteeing the twofold functions of ECEC — social and educational — in the process of defining a unified policy.

Target population

An integrated approach to ECEC seeks a universal provision in which both the needs of children and their families are met. However, the traditional polarization between the focus on the child's age and that on special groups of families and/or children considered to be 'in need' is still present in many countries. Full coverage of the over-three age group may be a good strategy to promote equality of educational opportunity prior to starting compulsory schooling. But when it is accompanied by lack of attention to the earlier ages and to the absence of full-time coverage, it indicates a rupture in the system. Bias in the meaning of universal provision is commonly found when it comes to advocating equality of educational opportunity. In this case, only the children's rights are considered. For example, due to the goal of the universal approach, some counties in Brazil, in the process of the transfer of the services to the educational sector, reduced the full time coverage for four to six year old children who were attending day care centres. The challenge is that of achieving the goal of universal provision in a context of diversity, especially in the light of the high level of costs incurred for provision on a full time basis and for the youngest.

Age range

The whole period during which the child is dependent on adult supervision should be a matter of attention in the quest for an integrated ECEC policy. However, in most countries the coverage is not only much greater for the older age group, but also involves abrupt gaps in the transition periods. Full co-operation between employment, family support, health, welfare and educational sectors, as well as among the services, including school and out-of-school, is needed so as to guarantee the continuity of the support given throughout the period beginning before birth and continuing after entry into primary education. Although most OECD countries are likely to provide families with non-institutionalised support (parental leaves, sick leaves, child allowances, housing subsidies), this type of support for families with young children is seldom found in the developing world where responsibility for the first years falls squarely, and even exclusively in some places, on family and community (Myers, 2000).

Financing

Strong public commitment is needed in order to make ECEC provision accessible and affordable to all that want it, which presupposes an effective presence of the state in the financing of the services. Nevertheless, public investment in ECEC is unequal, especially when it comes to the age groups of the child. A growing tendency to make access to ECEC for over-threes a statutory right contrasts with the limited public funding for under-threes which gives parents few options for out-of-home care and education for these age groups. Besides, in those countries in which the care and education of young children are predominantly seen as private tasks to be managed by individual families, there exists a strong tendency to delegate public responsibility

to private enterprise. The international organizations have reinforced this ideology by proposing informal and low-cost programmes in the ECEC field for developed countries. The challenge is to create a specific fund for ECEC with the financial contribution of large sectors of society.

Programme implementation

Types of service

A natural result of an integrated approach committed to meeting a wide range of needs and interests of children and families would be a more "client-oriented" approach with a correspondingly wide range of diversification in types of provision, hours of opening, fees etc. In many cases, governmental decentralization is desirable to facilitate adjustments to local needs and circumstances. A variety of uncoordinated services create difficulties of choice for the family and wasteful use of resources. On the other hand, the tendency to uniformity conflicts with the need to tailor ECEC programs in accordance with cultural, geographical, economic and age differences (Myers, 2000). Except for the Scandinavian countries, services for under-threes and out-of-school services are often in a weak position in terms of funding, staffing, access and types of provision in general. For children under three, high levels of private provision and informal arrangements continue to be the norm. The challenge presented is that of arriving at a system that presents a diversity of services within the context of unified objectives resulting in a wide range of choice for parents and the greater effectiveness of the services.

Staffing

The recognition of ECEC as a public matter presupposes the execution of the services by qualified, well paid, professionals of both sexes thus leaving aside the idea that child education and care are the exclusive prerogative of women, seen as mothers, who do not therefore require professional skills. Besides that, an integrated approach requires a professional profile, which fulfils both educational and social functions. The training should be both wide and specific, requiring knowledge of child development, the child's cultural context, social laws on the rights of children and their families, questions concerning the family context and the relationship between the centres and the family, multiprofessional team work, artistic abilities, and practical experience. Access to good training is the most important vehicle for creating a work force that is compatible with the goals of integrated services. A barrier to integration has been varying philosophies of the different professionals in the field.

Setting

An integrated approach for ECEC based on the legitimization of out-of-home child socialization seeks provision which may be increasingly seen and planned as an

integral part of the life of the family and community. Thus, integration should reflect a move away from an institutional and schooling pattern and create an atmosphere which is at the same time both centre-based and family-like. Home-care arrangements, from the purpose of complementing the diversity of services provided for children and families, may be useful in the process of expanding the system toward universal provision. But if they are planned with a view to replacing the centre-based provision approach, this may indicate a return to a family-centred ideology.

Pedagogical approach

The traditional care-oriented approach of the child care settings, combined with a low educational level of staff has resulted in a weak pedagogical emphasis for the younger age group. On the other hand, a school-oriented approach has shaped most pre-school settings, linked to the first years of primary schooling. Although the well-being of children and their holistic development, guided by the values set by society, has emerged as a major concern in most countries, special attention should also be given to the other dimensions of human existence that were previously considered to be the exclusive responsibility of the family. The shared control between adults and children and the right of the child to be heard are essential questions that arise from the shift in the focus from a deficit model to the recognition of the child as possessing rights. The great challenge is the creation of an ECEC pedagogy that will make the emergence of a childhood culture possible, thus protecting and respecting the children as individuals, constituting groups and communities with their own rights and developing their emergent abilities and competencies.

Parent involvement

The concept of responsibility for the child as shared between the state and the family is not so simple in practice as it is on paper. Experience shows us that the relationship between staff and family is one of conflict in which the two sides compete with each other and are subject to feelings of jealousy, guilt and lack of respect. Parent involvement does not mean teaching parents to be parents nor seeing them as a source of professional or services stand-ins. An integrated approach presupposes stronger staff-parent partnerships based on dialogue, trust, respect, shared cultural knowledge and traditions as well as on the active and systematic participation of the family in the planning, implementation and evaluation processes.

IV THE PROCESS OF INTEGRATION: TRENDS, BENEFITS AND CONCERNS

Convergent and divergent trends

There exists a correlation among views about childhood, responsibility for the care and education of young children, the purposes of ECEC institutions and ECEC policy and provision with regard to government, delivery, starting age of compulsory schooling, age range, length of operation during the day and year, types of services, flexibility and availability for different groups, staffing (profile and conditions) and parent involvement.

There is currently a range among countries from an extreme tendency to view the responsibility for young children as a private issue to a tendency to regard it as a public question. The United Kingdom, the United States, the Netherlands and Australia are countries that have traditionally represented the former tendency, indicating a low level of government motivation regarding the offer of measures to reconcile employment and family responsibility. Until recently, access to public provision in the UK and the US has been limited to low-income families or children deemed "at risk". Besides the limited access, coverage is often part day. Low and moderate-income working mothers tend to experience real difficulties of access. Although there are trends toward universal access to provision for four-year-olds under educational auspices, these countries are still very far from achieving the requirements of a fully integrated approach.

The Nordic countries such as Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden have represented the second tendency, expressing a model of shared responsibility between the family and state. In these countries, provision has developed with the dual purpose of supporting children's development and promoting equal opportunities for men and women to participate in the work force. ECEC services are integrated in a more comprehensive social policy, with both social and educational functions; access is a right enshrined in legislation; provision covers a much wider age group than from three to six; most services are full-day and take place in centres, and the historical differences between the day care centre and kindergarten have practically gone. It is worth noting that in all these countries the services have been developed as a unified system outside the education sector at the national level, except for Sweden whose ECEC system has been transferred to educational auspices since 1996.

The Scandinavian countries seem to have gone one step further regarding the common issue presented in post-industrial societies, that is, the stress and disadvantages many women and children face due to the poor handling of the relationship between private and public worlds. A welfare model that guarantees equal rights to all citizens, a comprehensive family support policy and special

attention to the equality of opportunities and rights between men and women are found to be the main forces determining the success of the integration of care and education.

The benefits of an integrated approach

ECEC provision built on the premises of quality, continuity, flexibility, diversity and an inclusive approach means countless benefits to families, children, women, men, community and society. From a child's point of view, it broadens experiences and world of affective reference, which contributes to the construction of identity and the comprehension of the world, besides reinforcing skills of learning, and communication, and engagement in meaningful activities and relationships. ECEC provides opportunities for children to socialize with their peers and with adults and to learn what it means to be a citizen. It also constitutes meaningful support for the functioning of the family since it increases the possibilities of socialization and the interchange of experiences, helps to combine professional activity and family responsibility and optimizes the ability of the parents as such. For society it constitutes a social mechanism with great potential for fostering social and gender equality as well as for promoting social cohesion by providing underprivileged families with an opportunity to build social support and informal networks.

Advantages and risks of integration under the aegis of education

Consolidating administration under the aegis of education provides some advantages: it facilitates the development of a coherent policy framework of regulation, funding, training, and service delivery across the different phases of the educational system as well as co-operation between ECEC and primary school staff and pedagogical continuity for children in the transition from one level of education to another. Further, it makes the eligibility of all children in publicly provided ECEC more likely. However, there are risks in this approach. As ECEC becomes more fully integrated with compulsory schooling, the services may become more "school-like", in terms of opening hours, staffing, adult-child ratio, pedagogy, physical setting, and isolation from child welfare, health, and other correlated areas.

Sweden is the only OECD country participating in the Thematic Review that has fully integrated all its early childhood services and compulsory schools into the educational system under the auspices of the Ministry of Education. In this case, these risks do not seem to threaten the system. However, they are present in other experiences as, for example in Brazil, where the transition to the educational system has been accompanied by greater emphasis on the schooling aspect of child care institutions; negligence regarding the need for full-time coverage and provision for the under-threes; lack of recognition of the historical role of the welfare system in this area; irresponsibility on the part of the educational system concerning the training of lay workers; as well as the abrupt introduction of the segmentation of the services by age in contrast to the traditional division by goal. I wonder if the success of the

Swedish experience is not directly related to the context within which it was developed. The transfer of the ECEC services to the Ministry of Education took place 30 years after the creation of the first commission designed to present a plan for a unified system.

The ECEC field is relatively new and the tradition of the services directed to young children both in developing and developed countries is beset by as yet unresolved inconsistencies. Despite indubitable advances in the field, the prospect of integration, we would say, has scarcely begun. It is still at the stage of constructing its own identity, reviewing conceptions of childhood, care, education, maternity, paternity and family-state social responsibility. These are issues that demand a highly complex redefinition of its structural and functional system.

The commitment to such construction and redefinition is the point towards which all efforts should converge, as this is a necessary condition for overcoming the contradictions involved in the binomial family-society tension regarding the responsibility for young children. Guaranteeing the specificity of the field and the commitment to its double role, social and educational, are the key points. The practical implication of this process is to ensure the existence of an appropriate locus for this process of formation, and which does not represent a threat to the success of the steps that have already been taken. Hence the danger of exalting the educational sector as necessarily the most appropriate to guide this field or of suggesting that the unification of the services under its aegis is the necessary premise for integration.

Establishing a hierarchy of priorities

To avoid these risks, it would be prudent to establish a hierarchy of priorities for the process of ECEC integration starting by focusing on the requirements needed to build ECEC's own specific culture and identity, then moving on to education and then proceeding to the further challenge of a strong and equal partnership between ECEC and the schools.

Conclusion

An effectively integrated ECEC system is a project of constructing a new concept of extra-familial care and education as an expression of shared family and state responsibility; it is further an issue, which is at one and the same time, public and private. It is directly associated with joint attention to the needs of the child and of its family. In the realm of policy and program implementation, this project demands deep revision and redefinition of the functions, objectives and operation of the services that have traditionally assumed the care and education of young children.

Due to its close connection with issues related to maternity, paternity, women's role in society, family and employment, the establishment of a co-ordinated network with related sectors is desirable. But it depends very much on governments' clear

awareness of the comprehensive functions of ECEC, commitment to childhood, and strong political will. Once this posture has been achieved, an integrated and co-ordinated ECEC policy should, under governmental leadership, involve the whole of society in a joint, convergent work.

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The Childcare Resource and Research Unit at the Centre for Urban and Community Studies, University of Toronto, is a policy and research oriented facility which focuses on early childhood care and education. CRRU provides public education and policy analysis; consults on child care policy and research; publishes papers and other resources; maintains a comprehensive resource collection and computerized catalogue; and provides online resources and research through its website (www. childcarecanada.org).

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